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INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 4403
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 0619
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 5020
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC 0464

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 001197

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/20/2018

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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: NGOS RECEIVE PERMISSION FOR HUMAN
RIGHTS TRAININGS

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Two non-governmental organizations (NGOs) receiving Embassy Democracy Commission grants have been recently granted permission by authorities to conduct human rights trainings at schools and with law enforcement officials. Their success in engaging local officials on human rights issues demonstrates that such cooperation is possible and also indicative of a slowly improving atmosphere for local NGOs. We also agree with remarks by one of the NGO leaders that progress on human rights in Uzbekistan requires a long-term outlook and a step-by-step approach of engagement with authorities. We will continue to support similar projects in the future. End summary.

ACTIVIST CONDUCTS HUMAN RIGHTS TRAININGS AT SCHOOLS

¶2. (C) On October 16, poloff met with human rights activist Ulugbek Usmanov, whose organization recently received an Embassy Democracy Commission grant to conduct human rights trainings at schools in Tashkent province. Usmanov reported that he discussed the project with local and provincial-level Ministry of Education officials, who granted him permission to conduct the trainings this fall at three schools, one in the city of Tashkent and two in the Zangiyat region of Tashkent province.

¶3. (C) Usmanov explained that the trainings focused on increasing human rights awareness among youth. He reported tying in discussion of President Karimov's decree this year on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) with an in-depth discussion of each of the rights covered in the UDHR. He also compared the Uzbek Constitution with international human rights conventions. Another section of the trainings focused on the responsibilities governments have to protect the rights of their citizens.

¶4. (C) Usmanov planned to conduct a total of 10 three-hour trainings at each of the schools, which focused on students

from the ninth grade. He reported that approximately 20 to 25 students at each school participated in the trainings on a regular basis. He also noted that the lessons were popular with teachers, who asked him to conduct similar trainings for them in the future. Usmanov plans to expand the trainings next spring to schools in eight additional regions of Tashkent province. He also planned to open centers in schools where human rights-related literature would be displayed.

SUPPORT FROM NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER

15. (C) Usmanov received support from the project from the state-controlled National Human Rights Center, which donated literature that was distributed to the students. Usmanov personally met with the National Human Rights Center director, Akmal Saidov (who ran as an "independent" candidate in the 2007 presidential election). Saidov, who reportedly was initially taken aback by the idea, eventually voiced his support and has since offered to send his deputy, Akmadjon Ismoilov, to attend one of the trainings. Usmanov also was attempting to work through his brother, who works for Uzbek state TV, to televise the trainings.

ACTIVIST SEES CHANGE IN ATTITUDE ON THE PART OF AUTHORITIES

16. (C) Usmanov admitted that when he was first brainstorming the project last year, he never expected to receive permission to conduct the training at schools. He believed

that authorities were encouraged to grant him permission after President Karimov's decree on the UDHR was issued, but he also credited a gradually-improving atmosphere for NGOs. Embassy FSNs working on the Embassy's Democracy Commission program also have been told by several NGO representatives in different regions of the country that they have been given the "green light" by authorities to apply for Embassy grants.

LONG-TERM INVESTMENT REQUIRED FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRESS

17. (C) Usmanov stated his belief to poloff that progress on human rights in Uzbekistan requires long-term investment and a step-by-step approach of engagement with Uzbek authorities.

He believed the key was to raise human rights awareness among the younger generation - who have been less influenced by Soviet legacies and were more worldly in their outlook than older generations - so that they begin to expect more from their leaders. He was critical of other human rights activists who focused exclusively on criticizing authorities, an approach he felt was counterproductive because it alienated officials and made cooperation with them more difficult. In contrast, he believed that fostering such cooperation was key to achieving human rights improvements in Uzbekistan.

TRAININGS TEMPORARILY INTERRUPTED BY COTTON-PICKING

18. (C) Usmanov admitted that his trainings did face some problems, noting that they were temporarily interrupted at the schools in Zangiyat region after authorities pulled the ninth-grade students out of school to pick cotton. He reported that students at younger grades continued to attend school in Zangiyat as normal, and that the trainings were not interrupted at the school in Tashkent.

ACTIVIST'S SON IMPRISONED ON RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM CHARGES

19. (C) Usmanov is a serious human rights activist who has long reported on abuses in the country. His own son was convicted twice on religious extremism charges and remains imprisoned. Usmanov reported last seeing his son a year ago at prison colony 68/46 in Navoi province, at which time he appeared to be in good health. His son was recently

transferred for unknown reasons to Tashkent's Tashturma prison, and Usmanov has so far been unable to visit him. Usmanov noted that so-called "religious prisoners" were no longer being kept separately from other prisoners, but were still being singled out for abuse.

NGO CONDUCTS HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING FOR POLICE OFFICERS

¶10. (C) The Embassy's Democracy Commission also provided a grant this year for an anti-human trafficking NGO in Jizzakh province to conduct human rights trainings for local law enforcement officials. On October 2, poloff met in Jizzakh with the head of the NGO, Nazifa Kamalova, who reported that the trainings, which focused on international human rights norms, were well-attended by officials. Kamalova planned to conduct a total of 12 trainings for more than 300 Ministry of Internal Affairs officers. In addition, she planned to organize two round-table discussions on human rights with local officials, mahalla (neighborhood committee) representatives, students, and NGO leaders. In organizing the human rights trainings, Kamalova explained that she was able to draw upon the productive relationships that she had developed with law enforcement agencies while conducting previous trainings on trafficking-in-persons. She also offered to invite poloff to a future training session in

Jizzakh.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) The success of the two Democracy Commission grant recipients in engaging local authorities on human rights projects demonstrates that such cooperation - while never easy - is not impossible either. It is also indicative of a slowly improving environment for local NGOs in Uzbekistan. We agree with Usmanov that progress on human rights in Uzbekistan will require a patient step-by-step approach of engagement with local officials. The immediate payoffs of such cooperation may be modest, but these are long-term investments that hopefully will foster trust and eventually translate into more meaningful cooperation down the road. While we admire the brave work done by many human rights activists in reporting abuses in Uzbekistan, such efforts by themselves are unlikely to result in improvements. What we need is more projects that seek to engage local officials on human rights.

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